Robert Fergusson
1750 - 1774

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Biography:

Robert Fergusson (1750 - 1774) was born in Edinburgh on 5th Sept 1750, where he attended the High School before obtaining a bursary to Dundee Grammar School in 1762. This also took him to the University of St Andrews in 1765, but two years later, his father died and he had to return without a degree to support his family. He took a humble position as a clerk to the Commissary Office.

During his student days, Fergusson wrote his first poem, *Elegy on the Death of Mr Daid Gregory, late Professor of Mathematics in the University of St Andrews*. This mock elegy was written in Scots, at a time when most educated Scotsmen used English models in their writing. His use poetry appeared in *The Weekly Magazine* or *Edinburgh Amusement* and in his vivid social life was also a member of the Cape Club, which embraced a wide range of professions and social classes in its celebration of poetry and song.

His first magazine contributions were in English, but he soon showed his genius for Scots poetry, developing a flexible use of the language and a unique combination of the vernacular and the classical. He is best remembered for his long poem on Edinburgh, *Auld Reekie*.

Fergusson's language shows a range and assurance not seen in Scots since the Makars. He died young, in 1774, but managed to establish Scots poetry and make Burns possible.
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Contexts:

For a long time Robert Fergusson has been interesting to us more for his influence on Robert Burns than for his own work, and even still he tends to live in his shadow. When we read Fergusson it was to deepen our understanding of Burns who famously wrote about him: ‘O thou, my elder brother in misfortune/ By far my elder brother in the muse’. Indeed, it was reading Fergusson’s work that inspired Burns to take up writing poetry. He died in 1774, when Burns was 15. Fergusson himself was only 24 when he died and we can only look back with profound regret at the keen friendship that might have developed between them had he lived.

Now, though, the balance of favour has turned in Fergusson’s direction again and we see him as a great talent in his own right. Neglected for a long time by Edinburgh, the city he loved lived in and wrote about, his story is a deeply tragic one and we wonder what effect he would have had on Scottish literature if he had lived to fulfil the tremendous skill and talent he showed in the three years of his writing career.

He was a well-educated man, having studied at the University of St Andrews. There he received a wide-ranging education in the arts, and in particular studied the major English literary texts – Shakespeare, Pope, Chaucer etc. When his father died, he left university and went to Edinburgh to support himself and his mother by copying legal documents in a commissary clerk’s office – gruelling, laborious work which paid very little.

Like many people these days in grim, mind-numbing employment Fergusson lived for the weekends and the holidays. Things may have changed a lot in 300 years – but not that much. The world he describes may differ in a few details but in a good many of his poems we can easily identify with his descriptions of the many fairs and festivals in the Edinburgh calendar. Poems like Hallow Fair, Caller Oysters and The Leith Races describe the relief and joy that holidays bring, followed closely by the first taste of alcohol, then the merriment and singing and flirting that goes with the consumption of a few drinks – until, inevitably, excess clouds the senses in a haze of violence, abuse and, occasionally, drunken sex, the Polis get brought in and everybody wakes up sore the next day. A ‘work hard, play hard’ mentality, you could say.

Fergusson is regarded as an Edinburgh poet in much the same way as Burns is viewed as a poet of the countryside. He wrote about the people there, from all walks of life. You could say he walked it like he talked it. In several of his poems, like Mally Leigh, he conjures up a picture of a city filled with life and vivid characters. Auld Reekie is his most celebrated poem which is itself a celebration of Edinburgh street life and a pungent evocation of the time. It is widely considered to be Scots vernacular poetry at its best.

By no means, however, did Fergusson restrict his subject matter to the streets of the capital. The Farmer’s Ingle colourfully and loving describes country life. Elegy On the Death
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of Scots Music is a heartfelt lament for the death of Edinburgh Musician William M’Gibbon – and the demise of Scottish culture in general – and shows Fergusson’s command of the Scots language and classical poetic form.

We like that about Fergusson. His is an uncomplicated, unpretentious but highly artful poetry. In his poems lawyers and clerks rub shoulders with fisherfolk and market-traders – all flung together in the great democratic institution that is the pub. Everybody is equal when looked at thorough the bottom of a tumbler. Since poetry typically takes exalted subjects his sympathetic and realistic depiction of characters we could (snobbishly) describe as “low-life” he exalts them in the beauty of his art.

Fergusson chose to write in Scots – despite many, including his professor of Rhetoric at St Andrew’s University, being very much against the vernacular tradition – and he proved himself to have a natural ability in it. It is useful to remember here that although the Scots have always been a literate (and literary) nation, not all people could read and write the way we do now. Scots was largely a spoken language, not often written down, but it was the language of the people: the language they laughed and sang and argued in. Now, with the Union of the Parliaments in 1707 a lot of people thought it was improper or impolite or unseemly to use that language, and the language of England was the thing. 1707 had given the Scots something to be deeply angry about – since it happened without the consent of the people – and also something to argue with each other about. This argument fuelled a great revival in the arts in Scotland – sometimes called the Enlightenment – and Fergusson played a significant part in that. Since 1707 choosing to write in Scots had become a political act – and so it has remained right up to the present day. By choosing to write in Scots you were saying No! to the domination of English (language) culture and Aye! to your own.

Written by Colin Clark
Auld Reikie

Auld Reikie, wale o’ ilka Town
That Scotland kens beneath the Moon;
Where couthy Chiels at E’ening meet
Their bizzing Craigs and Mous to weet;
And blythly gar auld Care gae bye
Wi’ blinkit and wi’ bleering Eye:
O’er lang frae thee the Muse has been
Sae frisky on the Simmer’s Green,
Whan Flowers and Gowans wont to glent
In bonny Blinks upo’ the Bent;
But now the Leaves a Yellow die
Peel’d frae the Branches, quickly fly;
And now frae nouther Bush nor Brier
The spreckl’d Mavis greets your ear;
Nor bonny Blackbird Skims and Roves
To seek his Love in yonder Groves.

Then, Reikie, welcome! Thou canst charm
Unfl eggit by the year’s Alarm;
Not Boreas that sae snelly blows,
Dare here pap in his angry Nose:
Thanks to our Dads, whase biggin stands
A Shelter to surrounding Lands.

Now Mom, with bonny Purpie-smiles,
Kisses the Air-cock o’ St. Giles;
Rakin their Ein, the Servant Lasses
Early begin their Lies and Clashes;
Ilk tells her Friend of saddest Distress,
That still she brooks frae scouling Mistress;
As be subjected to her Tongue,
When justly censur’d in the Wrong.

On Stair wi’ Tub, or Pat in hand,
The Barefoot Housemaids looe to stand,
That antrin Fock may ken how Snell
Auld Reikie will at Morning Smell;
Then, with an Inundation Big as
The Burn that ’neath the Nore Loch Brig is,
They kindly shower Edina's Roses,
To Quicken and Regale our Noses.
Now some for this, wi' Satyr's Leesh,
Ha'e gi'en auld Edinburgh a Creesh:
But without Souring nocht is sweet;
The Morning smells that hail our Street,
Prepare, and gently lead the Way
To Simmer canty, braw and gay:
Edina's Sons mair eithly share,
Her Spices and her Dainties rare,
Then he that's never yet been call'd
Aff frae his Plaidie or his Fauld.

Now Stairhead Critics, senseless Fools,
Censure their Aim, and Pride their Rules,
In Luckenbooths, w' glouring Eye,
Their Neighbours sma'est Faults descry:
If ony Loun should dander there,
Of awkward Gate, and foreign Air;
They trace his Steps, till they can tell
His Pedigree as weel's himsell.

Whan Phoebus blinks wi' warmer Ray
And Schools at Noonday get the play,
Then Bus'ness, weighty Bus'ness comes;
The Trader glours; he doubts, he hums:
The Lawyers eke to Cross repair;
Their Wigs to shaw, and toss an Air;
While busy Agent closely plies,
And a' his kittle Cases tries.

Hallow Fair

At Hallowmas, whan nights grow lang,
And starnies shine fu' clear;
Whan fock, the nippin cald to bang,
Their winter hap-warms wear,
Near Edinbrough a fair there hads,
I wat there's nane whose name is,
For strappin dames and sturdy lads,
And cap and stoup, mair famous
Than it that day.
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Upo’ the tap o’ ilka lum
The sun began to keek,
And bad the trig made maidens come
A sightly joe to seek
At Hallow-fair, where browsters rare
Keep gude ale on the gantries
And dinna scrimp ye o’ a skair
O' kebbucks frae their pantries,
Fu' saut that day.

The Hallowmas Fair would have been the first time since the summer for the people of Edinburgh to let their hair down, get smartened up in their holiday clothes and get stuck in to the drink – not to mention each other. Along with the evocations of the sharp cold and the bright Autumn morning sunshine, Fergusson describes the fair as being as famous for the young men and women getting dressed to impress each other, as for the quality and quantity of the drink on offer.

Here country John in bonnet blue,
An’ eke his Sunday claise on,
Rins efter Meg wi’ rokelay new,
An’ sappy kisses lays on;
She’ll tauntin say, Ye silly coof!
Be o’ your gab mair spairin;
He’ll tak the hint, and criesh her loof
Wi’ what will buy her fairin,
To chow that day.

In the third stanza, Fergusson personalises the poem a little and introduces us to a couple of characters – John and Meg – a young couple clearly in love with each other. He runs after her drooling kisses on her, but she’s having none of it and shoos him away. To keep in her good books he gives her some money for her “fairn” – literally ‘money for the fair’.

Here chapman billies tak their stand,
An’ shaw their bonny wallies;
Wow, but they lie fu’ gleg aff hand
To trick the silly fallows:
Heh, Sirs! what cairds and tinklers come,
An’ ne’er-do-weel horse-coupers,
An’ spae-wives fenzying to be dumb,
Wi’ a siclike landloupers,
To thrive that day.
Here the full spectacle of the fair is revealed – a motley assemblage of vagabonds, scoundrels and undesirables all eager to part the innocent young from their cash.

Here Sawny cries, frae Aberdeen;
‘Come ye to me fa need:
The brawest shanks that e’er were seen
‘I’ll sell ye cheap an’ guid.
I wyt they are as pritty hose
As come fae weyr or leem:
Here tak a rug, and shaw’s your pose:
Forseeth, my ain’s but teem
‘An’ light this day.’

The scene is like the Barras on a Saturday afternoon. He describes an Aberdeen market traders’ patter as he tries to attract people to his stall, offering bargains he claims will ruin him. Fergusson mimics the accent of the Aberdeen trader: pritty for pretty; fa for who.

Ye wives, as ye gang thro’ the fair;
O mak your bargains hooly!
O’ a’ thir wylie loons beware,
Or fegs they will ye spulie.
For fainn-year Meg Thamson got,
Frae thir mischievous villains,
A scaw’d bit o’ a penny note,
That lost a score o’ shillins
To her that day.

Fergusson urges the women attending the Fair to be on their guard (I don’t know why he should single out the women – perhaps the men are already throwing all their cash at the browsters.) He warns them that the smooth talking young men who work at the fair will take all their money off them in exchange for dodgy merchandise, and gives the example of Meg Thamson who last year spent all her money on worthless rubbish.

The dinlin drums alarm our ears,
The serjeant screeches fu’ loud,
‘A’ gentlemen and volunteers
That wish your country gude,
Come here to me, and I shall gie
Twa guineas and a crown,
A bowl o’ punch, that like the sea
Will soum a lang dragoon
‘Wi’ ease this day.’
Without the cuissers prance and nicker,
   An’ our the ley-rig scud;
In tents the carles bend the bicker,
   An’ rant an’ roar like wud.
Then there’s sic yellowchin and din,
   Wi’ wives and wee-anes gablin,
That ane might true they were a-kin
   To a’ the tongues at Babylon,
   Confus’d that day.

In stanzas 7 and 8 the drink really begins to flow. A bowl of punch is offered, for “twi guineas and a crown”, big enough, the sejeant assures us, to drown a unit of soldiers. In the booze tent, as the festivities proceed outside with lancers putting on a display, the rowdy atmosphere is likened to the tongues of Babylon (or Babel?) – a confused babble of chatter as the punters get drunker.

When Phoebus ligs in Thetis lap,
   Auld Reekie gies them shelter;
Where cadgily they kiss the cap,
   An’ ca’t round helter-skelter.
Jock Bell gaed furth to play his freaks,
   Great cause he had to rue it,
For frae a stark Lochaber aix
   He gat a clamihewit
   Fu’ sair that night.

"Ohon!" quo’ he, ‘I’d rather be
   ’By sword or bagnet stickit,
   Than hae my crown or body wi’
   ’Sic deadly weapons nicket.’
Wi’ that gat anither straik
   Mair weighty than before,
   That gar’d his feckless body aik,
   An’ spew the reikin gore,
   Fu’ red that night.

He peching on the cawsey lay,
   O’ kicks and cuffs weel sair’d;
A Highland aith the serjeant gae,
   ‘She maun pe see our guard.’
Out spak the weirlike corporal,
   ‘Pring in ta drunken sot.’
They trail’d him ben, an’ by my saul,
   He paid his drunken groat,
   For that neist day.

Phoebus: the sun god; ligs: rests; Thetis: goddess of the sea
Cadgily: cheerfully; cap: cup
Ca’t: pass it
Gaed furth: went out; freaks: pranks
Rue: regret
Stark: violent; aix: axe
Clamihewit: heavy blow
Quo: said
Bagnet: bayonet
Nicket: cut
Straik: blow
Gar’d: made; aik: ache
Reikin: steaming; gore: blood
Peching: panting; cawsey: pavement
Weel sair’d: well served
Aith: oath
Spak: spoke; weirlike: aggressive
Sat: fool
Trail’d: dragged; ben: inside
Groat: fine
Neist: next.
In verses 9 – 11, the transforming effects of the drink are beginning to take hold. Fergusson ironically invokes the Roman gods as a literary, high-flown counterpoint to the base antics of the drunken mob at the Fair as their rabble rousing plunges new depths. Jock Bell comes off worst here as he goes off to play merry – we’re not told exactly what he gets up to with his “freaks” but he receives a mighty buffet around the head from a Lochaber aix for his trouble. This would be the 18th century equivalent of a truncheon, back in the days when the Police were less, let’s say, humane than the law enforcement officers we know today.

Verse 10 continues Jock’s story and clearly the knock around the head has failed to instil any sense into him. For his cheek he is rewarded with another knock, “mair weighty than before” which has the effect of splitting his head open.

In verse 11, the unfortunate Jock, lies catching his breath on the pavement. The ironic touch of Fergusson has him ‘well served’ by the “kicks and cuffs” of the policemen. It’s clear whose side Fergusson is on. The guards are described as “weirlike” — literally warlike — and their Highland accent is mocked: pring for bring, ta for the. Poor Jock’s night of disaster is completed with the payment of his “drunken groat” — a fine for being drunk and disorderly, though since he was only out for a bit of fun, we wonder, between Jock and the policemen, who is the most disorderly.

Fergusson leaves us with a note of caution: stay away from the Police! This “black squad” are the most brutal people anywhere allowed to wear a uniform and they are only too happy to knock you about with the slightest reason.
Furthermore, he cautions us to drink wisely. “A wee soup drink” we can read ironically – much as people who are going out on a major spree often say they are only going out for a “wee dram” or a “wee tipple”. Or else we can take him at his word: a couple of drinks, as long as you’re sensible about it, will bring you to no harm. But too much of the stuff will lead you into nothing but trouble.

The poem reads as a song, or more precisely, a ballad. The jolly lilting rhythm - swapping alternate iambic of tetrameter with trimeter carries us along. It tells the story of a typical day at the fair. Plenty of it is in good humour but we cannot help but be shocked at the level of violence suffered at the hands of the guards. There is a cautionary element to it too, which we can take or leave. Certainly 300 years of history doesn’t seem to have changed the scheme of a drunken night in Scotland.

The antics of the Edinburgh folk – of which he was no mere innocent bystander – are one of the themes of Fergusson’s poetry. The humour, compassion, and ironic detachment he uses serve to paint a warm picture and the love he clearly felt for his home town.

Written by Colin Clark
The Death of Scots Music

On Scotia’s plains, in days of yore,
When lads and lasses tartan wore,
Saft Music rang on ilka shore,
In hamely weid;
But harmony is now no more,
And music dead.

Round her the feather’d choir would wing,
Sae bonnily she wont to sing,
And sleeely wake the sleeping string,
Their sang to lead,
Sweet as the zephyrs of the spring;
But now she’s dead.

Mourn ilka nymph and ilka swain,
Ilk sunny hill and dowie glen;
Let weeping streams and Naiads drain
Their fountain head;
Let echo swell the dolefu’ strain,
Since music’s dead.

Whan the saft vernal breezes ca’
The grey-hair’d Winter’s fogs awa’,
Naeboby than is heard to blaw,
Near hill or mead,
On chaunter, or on aiten straw,
Since music’s dead.

Nae lasses now, on simmer days,
Will lilt at bleaching of their claes;
Nae herds on Yarrow’s bonny braes,
Or banks of Tweed,
Delight to chant their hameil lays,
Since music’s dead.

At glomin now the bagpipe’s dumb,
Whan weary owsen hameward come;
Sae sweetly as it wont to bum,
And Pibrachs skreed;
We never hear its warlike hum;
For music’s dead.
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Macgibbon’s gane: Ah! waes my heart!
The man in music maist expert,
Wha cou’d sweet melody impart,
And tune the reed;
Wi’ sic a slee and pawky art;
But now he’s dead.

Ilk carline now may grunt and grane,
Ilk bonny lassie make great mane,
Since he’s awa’, I trow there’s nane
Can fill his stead;
The blythest sangster on the plain!
Alake, he’s dead!

Now foreign sonnets bear the gree,
And crabbit queer variety
Of sound fresh sprung frae Italy,
A bastard breed!
Unlike that saft-tongu’d melody
Which now lies dead.

Cou’d lav’rocks at the dawning day,
Cou’d linties chirming frae the spray,
Or todling burns that smoothly play
O’er gowden bed,
Compare wi’ Birks of Indermay?
But now they’re dead.

O Scotland! that cou’d yence afford
To bang the pith of Roman sword,
Winna your sons, wi’ joint accord,
To battle speed?
And fight till Music be restor’d,
Which now lies dead.

It’s difficult to imagine a world without music. Just think - no music! No CDs, no internet, no radio, no endless parade or rock and roll heroes, no Bach or Mozart or Beethoven?
Impossible, really.

The closest we can come is to the deaths of musicians like Elvis or John Lennon or Miles Davis or Kurt Cobain, which had very profound effects on the people who loved their music. But their recordings live on (and on and on) in their LPs and CDs and television programmes and reissues and greatest hits albums etc, etc. None of these things existed
in Robert Fergusson’s time, of course. When a musician died, he meant it.

In a way, Fergusson’s poem has a 20th century counterpart in the song “American Pie” by Don McLean, in which the deaths of three rock and roll musicians of the 50s (Ritchie Valens, Buddy Holly and The Big Bopper – really, that was his name) are mourned with the line “the day the music died.” In his song McLean mourns not just the passing of three great rock & roll musicians – but an entire way of life that was 50s America.

The musician in question in Fergusson’s poem, the man responsible here for the “death of music”, is William M’Gibbon: “The man in music maist expert.” It seems that M’Gibbon was a popular figure in Edinburgh and a master of his instrument: “Wha cou’d sweet melody impart, /And tune the reed, /Wi’ sic a slee and pawky art.” Curiously for the modern reader, Fergusson’s subject isn’t a poster-boy teeny-bop pin-up – he’s a bagpiper.

Fergusson works hard on our behalf to help us imagine a world without music. Throughout the poem he describes situations where we might expect to hear it, beginning with the first two stanzas which describe Scotland as a land filled and suffused with music – a natural music of birdsong and the sound of young men and women singing to each other. But, we are continually reminded that “music’s dead”. It is undoubtedly a nostalgic and exaggerated view that Fergusson puts forward here – much more in keeping with sentimental notions of Scotland that we now sell to German and American tourists. Scotland hills may well be alive with sound but any realistic description of the music of the highlands would have it buzzing with midges and frantic with the busy swish of BMWs on wet tarmac.

But these stanzas set up the exalted tone of the poem. This is assisted by the reference to Naiads and nymphs – figures from classical literature. Indeed the type of poem – the elegy – is a classical poetic form which Fergusson uses to lend the subject matter a bit of weight. He is a poet famous for his skill in using vernacular (or popular) forms of verse like the ballad, but here he shows us that not only is he familiar with more classical forms of poetry, he is also accomplished in them. By welding the voice of the people to the forms of classical poetry, like the elegy, Fergusson was making a point about the validity of his own language since many people felt that the only language suitable for the expression of delicate emotion and high sentiment was English. He proved it wasn’t.

The elegy is a sombre poem in which the poet reflects on the death and significance of someone. Here it is not merely a man – William M’Gibbon, famous piper – who is mourned, but music itself. Such was the musicality of M’Gibbon, Fergusson tells us, that his passing represents the passing of all music. “There’s nane /Can fill his stead” he says. Strong stuff. Is there anyone we could say that about – truthfully, honestly – these days? Perhaps a few, but we wouldn’t miss them for long.

The sombre tone of the poem comes across strongly with the repetition of “dead” at the end of each stanza: “he’s dead” or “music’s dead” or “which now lies dead”. It provides a
heavy rhythm, slowing the poem down, the last phrase of each stanza tolling like a funeral bell. But is it only music that’s dead? A few stanzas give a clue that perhaps Fergusson’s subject is something broader. Perhaps it’s not just M’Gibbon – though certainly the depth of feeling in the poem is real enough, if a wee bit over-cooked in places – but a whole way of life that Fergusson is mourning. The loss of traditions, and customs as exemplified by music is perhaps the underlying theme of this poem.

In the ninth stanza he writes, with some alarm, that “Now foreign sonnets bear the gree.” “Sonnets” can mean songs, or tales or stories, as well as a kind of poem. Fergusson has a deep distaste for this unwelcome intrusion as if he feels that foreign tastes and habits have begun to take place over Scotland’s own native ones. “A crabbit, queer variety! Of sound fresh sprung frae Italy. A bastard breed!” he says. These days we find it difficult to share his bitterness – things from Italy are great, we think. Without Italy we wouldn’t have lasagne or olive oil or sun-dried tomatoes or spag-bol. And given the pick between a plate of porridge and a pizza I’m guessing the choice wouldn’t tug too hard at your conscience.

But that’s because we’re more comfortable with our identity now; we’re more or less happy to be part of the UK and still retain a very strong sense of our own separate identity as a nation. When we view Fergusson’s poem with a bit of historical perspective we see that his culture was under threat. The union with England, for Fergusson and for others, was nothing but trouble and it was going to lead, they thought – and with good reason – to the dissolving of a uniquely Scottish culture and way of life. In the final stanza we read Fergusson’s rousing call for the brave men of Scotland who, like their ancestors long ago who fought to keep the Roman invaders out, must again resist this foreign invasion (of culture this time) and fight to keep Scotland’s identity unique. The music he wants to keep alive is more of a metaphorical kind – that combination of elements unique to this country that make it what it is. Which includes bagpipe music, as it does the Scots language, and all kinds of customs and traditions, and tastes in food and drink.

When we look back over the poem again, we realise that in getting us to imagine a world without music, he’s really after something deeper: to imagine a Scotland that isn’t Scotland anymore.

Written by Colin Clark
Further Reading

Websites

firstfoot.com
good general introduction to Fergusson, Scotland’s “forgotten” Poet.
http://www.firstfoot.com/Great%20Scot/robertfergusson.htm

electricscotland.com
Thorough examination of Fergusson and his work
http://www.electricscotland.com/poetry/fergusson.htm

St Andrew’s University
A detailed study by Robert Crawford, one of Scotland’s finest contemporary poets and
professor of English Literature at Fergusson’s old uni.
Click here for web link

Auld Reikie
Read Fergusson’s greatest poem on-line.
http://eilibrary.utoronto.ca/rpo/display/poet290.html

tocherburn.co.uk
read more of Fergusson’s poems here
http://www.tocherburn.co.uk/Poet.htm

The following websites will be of general interest to the student of Scottish literature:

Scottish Literary Tour Trust
Featuring an extensive section on the Makars’ Literary Tour
http://www.scot-lit-tour.co.uk

National Library of Scotland
Homepage of the NLS.
http://www.nls.uk/

Scottish Poetry Library
A very attractively laid out website with information on some of the major poets of the
20th century along with detailed readings of their best-known works.
http://www.spl.org.uk/index.html

SLAINTE
The name stands for Scottish Librarians Across the Internet. This excellent site features
brief, well-written biographies of many of the great Scottish writers.
http://www.slainte.org.uk/Scotauth/scauhome.htm
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Scots Online
From essays to an online dictionary this is a web-based resource with everything you could possibly need to know about the Scots language and how it is used.
http://www.scots-online.org/

Shudder at the Niffer Essay
http://www.fleimin.demon.co.uk/Bletherskite/Shudder_At_The_Niffer.htm

Gaelic & Scottish Connections
A resource on Gaelic language and culture, featuring poetry and essays and an online dictionary.
http://www.gaelicscottish.com/

Electric Scotland
Electric Scotland is a real mixed bag of Scottish paraphernalia with nationalist overtones. This page in particular allows you to hear and read complete Scots poems, from MacDiarmid to Dunbar.
http://www.electricscotland.com/si/features/scots/complete.htm

Literature links
An encyclopaedic web of links to Scots magazines, monuments, libraries and languages.
http://www.burryman.com/scotland.html - lit

Project Gutenberg
This is a web-based publisher of copyright expired books.
http://www.ibiblio.org/gutenberg/cgi-bin/sdb/t9.cgi/

Poetry Archive
A good, user-friendly site, sponsored by a bookseller, which features examples from some of the best poets in the world.
http://www.poetry-archive.com/

Poem Index
Almost 900 poems in the English language from 13th to 19th centuries.
http://tcsu.trin.cam.ac.uk/~john/pgbew/html-interface/full-index.html

Representative Poetry On-line
An enormous and easy to use resource based at the University of Toronto featuring alphabetical and chronological lists of 450 poets with substantial selections of their work.
http://eirlibrary.utoronto.ca/rpo/display/poet42.html

Scottish PEN
The name stands for Poets, Playwrights, Editors, Essayists and Novelists and exists to promote the friendly co-operation between writers in the interests of freedom of expression throughout the world.
Robert Fergusson
1750 - 1774

http://www.scottishpen.org/

Writers' Portraits
Photographic and biographical pen portraits of some of Scotland's greatest contemporary writers.
http://www.nls.uk/writestuff/

Anthologies

The Book of Prefaces
edited and glossed by Alasdair Gray
Bloomsbury (2000)
Every home should have one. Dust jacket contains this advice: “Warning to Parents, Teachers, Librarians, Booksellers. Do not let smart children handle this book. It will help them pass examinations without reading anything else.”

The Faber Book of Twentieth Century Scottish Poetry
Edited by Douglas Dunn
Faber & Faber (1992)
A detailed account of the dramatic transformations the Scottish verse underwent in the previous century, with an enlightening introduction by Dunn.

The New Penguin Book of Scottish Verse
edited by Robert Crawford and Mick Imlah
Penguin (2000)
A beautifully presented chronology of some of the greatest Scottish poetry, from the 6th century to the present.

The Penguin Book of Scottish Verse
edited by Tom Scott
Penguin (1970)
Earlier incarnation of above, edited by Scott – a recent inductee to Makars' Court. Contains the infamous and controversial rude verse attributed to Burns. Makes for an interesting comparison with Crawford & Imlah's anthology.

An Anthology of Scottish Women Poets
Edited by Catherine Kerrigan
Edinburgh University Press (1991)
Covers folksong, ballad, Scots and Anglo-Scots, from the middle ages to contemporary poets.
Robert Fergusson
1750 - 1774

Studies and Criticism

Scottish Literature
eds Douglas Gifford, et al
This is all just about all you need to know about Scottish literature. A comprehensive, and very readable book. Excellent.

The Mainstream Companion to Scottish Literature
Trevor Royle
Mainstream (1993)
Alphabetically arranged standard reference on Scottish literature.

Modern Scottish Literature
Alan Bold
Longman (1983)
Learned, erudite discussion of the major writers and texts of Scottish literature in the 20th century. Brilliant study material for Higher English.

Imagine a City: Glasgow In Fiction
Moira Burgess
Argyll (1998)
The definitive work on Glasgow’s place in Scottish literature, written by the author of the Makars Court Tour script.

A History of Scottish Women’s Writing
edited by Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan
Edinburgh University Press (1997)
This is the best book around for Scottish women’s writing at the moment. Tone can be a bit academic in places.

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